

Repertory Blues

...Why Did Dominion's First-Established Little Theatre Go Into Recess?

Special to the "Record"

by

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DESPITE disclaimers, there was much truth in the article ("Radio Record" March 4) by Jack Daw, in which he claimed that danger threatened the existence of New Zealand's amateur theatre. Simultaneously with its publication came the news that the Auckland Little Theatre Society, pioneers of the repertory movement in the Dominion, had, after thirteen years as a cultural force in the community, decided to go into recess.

This surprise decision to cease public productions for a year was made at an extraordinary general meeting and was made only by the chairman's casting vote. In the meantime play readings will be carried on, and steps will be taken to explore the latest developments in repertory and amateur production and to secure performing rights of suitable plays.

REASONS advanced by those supporting recess were that supply of amateur effort exceeded the demand, that there was difficulty in finding suitable plays, and that the society could not rely on the box office to cover expenses.

It is well known that "the mice" have been nesting in the box office at Auckland. Last year losses were registered on all four productions.

At the meeting there were two distinct schools of thought—that which advocated plays of a more entertaining type—and that representative of the repertory diehards, who wanted nothing but the repertory type of production.

Ever since this surprise decision was made hundreds have been asking, "What will happen to the society? Will it survive? Will members leave and join up with some of the newer societies? (There are twenty-three other organisations affiliated with the Auckland area of the British Drama League).

The decision has also provoked a sharp newspaper controversy, some correspondents even suggesting that, with an eye to the box-office, the society could not put on plays marred by "bad acting"; that they should have put only new actors in their play readings, giving them the opportunity to show what they could achieve.

One writer considered that the society was not a repertory society at all and had no intention of ever becoming one!

One cannot agree that Auckland—or New Zealand—lacks production or dramatic talent. The correspondent who offered the opinion that the present state of the Auckland Little Theatre Society was due to lack of vitality



LADY MACBETH IN ENGLISH REPERTORY

"...Glamis thou art and Cawdor, and shalt be what thou art promised...."

was nearer the mark. With a strong and practical guiding mind in an experienced producer the Little Theatre could rally its resources and try again. The society supplies a need. There are some who believe that the matter of royalties has helped to cripple the society more than any other.

THE Auckland Little Theatre Society is the oldest repertory society in the Dominion. It was formed

early in 1925—the sponsors at its birth being the late Herbert Bentley, F. L. Armitage, and Henry H. Hayward. Herbert—or "Bunny" as he was affectionately called by his associates—Bentley was the first producer. He was a man of wide theatrical experience, having, as a cadet, played with Sir Henry Irving, and graduated to "leads" with J. C. Williamson.

That night in May, 1925, when the society made its first bow to the public in Bernard Shaw's "Penny's First Play," in the Auckland Amateur Operatic Society's hall in Grafton Road, was a night to remember. That occasion marked the launching of a venture that was to gather impetus, snowball-like, until after a very few years it stood as a monument to the courage and effort of its founders and its workers.

Under Mr. Bentley's able leadership the society captured the goodwill and support of Aucklanders—it became the social centre of amateur drama and its subscribers numbered, at one time, over two thousand.

Soon other repertory societies were formed, until at present there are over forty in Auckland and suburbs.

This plentitude has sapped the membership of the subscribing public and has lessened the financial backing of the Little Theatre's presentations. Such was perhaps inevitable.

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INTEREST in the Little Theatre has never been so keen in New Zealand as it is to-day—yet, a few weeks ago, the Dominion's oldest-established society, the Auckland Little Theatre—went into recess. Why?